

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)



Guidance for Administrators in Parks and Recreational Facilities

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Parks, trails, and open spaces can provide opportunities for physical activity while also providing opportunities for a break, health, and wellness. People are encouraged to use parks, trails, and open spaces safely while following current guidance to [prevent the spread of COVID-19](#).

The following offers guidance for the use and administration of local, state, and national parks. Public parks and recreational facilities can be operated and managed by groups such as:

- County, city, state, or national governments;
- Apartment complexes;
- Homeowners' associations.

Administrators of parks and recreational facilities can determine, in collaboration with [local health officials](#), whether and how to implement these considerations, making adjustments to meet the unique needs and circumstances of the local community. Implementation should be guided by what is safe, feasible, practical, and acceptable, and be tailored to the needs of each community. These considerations are meant to supplement — not replace — any local, state, territorial, federal, or tribal health and safety laws, rules, or regulations with which park administrators must comply.

Help lower the risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 by following these guiding principles:

Guiding Principles to Keep in Mind at Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces

Reducing the risk of spreading the virus that causes COVID-19

- The more an individual interacts with people he or she doesn't live with and the closer and longer each interaction is, the higher the risk is of getting infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.
- The [higher the level of community transmission](#), the higher the risk of the virus that causes COVID-19 spreading during park operations. In some communities, it may not be possible for the public to safely visit parks, trails, and open spaces due to the level of community transmission; this, combined with areas conducive to larger numbers of people congregating, increases individual risk. In these cases, encourage community members to consider safer alternate activities, such as having a picnic with members of their household in their backyard or virtually visiting National Parks through the National Park Service [Find Your "Virtual" Park](#) [↗](#) .

If community transmission does not prohibit the public from visiting a park, trail, or open space, park administrators are encouraged to consider the levels of risk below when operating parks, trails, and open spaces. The risk of the virus that causes COVID-19 spreading at parks, trails, and open spaces is ranked as follows, from lowest to highest:

Lowest Risk:

- Parks and trails allow for [social distancing](#) of at least 6 feet between individuals or household groups.
- Staff and visitors stay at least 6 feet away from people they don't live with.
- Tourist attractions (e.g., monuments) are open only without overcrowding and allow for social distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals or household groups.
- All staff and visitors wear [masks](#), especially when other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain.

Park staff [clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces (e.g., doorknobs or handrails) and shared objects between uses or on a frequent schedule with [EPA approved products](#) [↗](#) .

Moderate Risk:

- Parks and trails are open with partial modifications to allow for [social distancing](#) of at least 6 feet between individuals or household groups in some areas.
- Tourist attractions (e.g., monuments) are open with partial modifications and messaging to avoid overcrowding and to allow for social distancing of at least 6 feet between individuals or household groups.
- Some staff and/or visitors wear [masks](#).
- Park staff [clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces and shared objects more than once per day, but less frequently than between each use with [EPA approved products](#) [↗](#) .

Highest Risk:

- Parks and trails are open at full capacity with no modifications to allow for [social distancing](#) of at least 6 feet between individuals or household groups.
- Staff and visitors from different areas* with varying levels of community transmission are less than 6 feet away.
- Tourist attractions (e.g., monuments) are open at full capacity with no modifications or messaging to avoid overcrowding or allow for social distancing.
- No [masks](#) are worn.
- Park staff [clean and disinfect](#) frequently touched surfaces and shared objects once per day and may or may not use [EPA approved products](#) [↗](#) .

*Different area could be another town, city, or county.

Post information to promote everyday preventive actions.

Park administrators should consider displaying posters and [signs](#) throughout the park to frequently remind visitors to take steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19. These messages should include information about:

- Staying home [if you are sick](#) or do not feel well, and what to do if you're sick or feel ill.
- Using [social distancing](#) to maintain a distance of 6 feet between others in all areas of the park.
- [Covering coughs and sneezes](#) with a tissue or the inside of the elbow. Used tissues should be thrown into the trash.
- [Washing hands](#) often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom, before eating, and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and rub hand together until dry.
 - Young children should be supervised to ensure they are using sanitizer safely.
- Avoiding touching eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Using [masks](#). Masks are **most** essential in times when physical distancing is difficult. Masks should not be placed on:
 - Babies and children younger than 2 years old
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing
 - Anyone who cannot remove the mask without assistance
- For parks that allow dogs or have dog parks, walk dogs on a leash at least six feet away from others who do not live in your household. Masks should not be placed on dogs, as it could harm your [pet](#).

Maintain restrooms that remain open. Ensure they have functional toilets, clean and disinfected surfaces, and handwashing supplies.

If possible, restrooms should be open if a park is open for public visitation. If restrooms will be closed, notify visitors ahead of time so they can prepare appropriately. Ensure that open restrooms are:

- Operating with functional toilets.
- [Cleaned and disinfected](#) regularly, particularly high-touch surfaces such as faucets, toilets, doorknobs, and light switches.
- Clean, and disinfect restrooms daily or more often if possible using [EPA-registered disinfectants](#) [↗](#) that are effective against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.
- Following the [Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting](#) to develop, implement, and maintain a plan to perform regular cleanings to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19.
- Regularly stocked with supplies for handwashing, including soap and a way to dry hands (e.g., paper towels, hand dryer) or hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and no touch/foot pedal trash cans (preferably covered).
- In addition, advise employees to always wear gloves appropriate for the chemicals being used when they are cleaning and disinfecting, and that they may need additional PPE based on the setting and product. Employees should follow the directions on the label of the products. Ensure that cleaning products are stored properly and kept away from children.

NOTE: Often restroom facilities without running water, such as portable toilets and vault toilets, are not stocked with hand hygiene products. Encourage visitors to bring their own hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol for use in these facilities.

Keep swimming pools properly cleaned and disinfected.

Evidence suggests that COVID-19 cannot be spread to humans through most recreational water. Additionally, proper operation of these aquatic venues and disinfection of the water (with chlorine or bromine) should inactivate the virus that causes COVID-19.

- Refer to CDC's [considerations for Public Pools, Hot Tubs, and Water Playgrounds During COVID-19](#) for additional information.
- Encourage [social distancing](#) of at least 6 feet between visitors by posting [signs](#) and modifying layouts of seating areas.
- CDC's [Model Aquatic Health Code](#) has more recommendations to prevent illness and injuries at public pools.

Be prepared to cancel or postpone large events and gatherings.

- Monitor and adhere to guidelines issued at the national, state, and local levels related to [limiting the size of gatherings](#).
- Continually assess current conditions regarding the spread of COVID-19 and engage with federal, state, and/or local [public health officials](#) when deciding whether to postpone, cancel, or reduce the number of attendees (if possible) for gatherings.

Be thoughtful about the re-opening and care of playgrounds.

- Consult with public health officials and refer to state and local regulations regarding the appropriate timing of re-opening playgrounds.
- Outdoor areas generally require normal [routine cleaning](#) and do not require disinfection. Spraying disinfectant on sidewalks and in parks is not an efficient use of disinfectant supplies and has not been proven to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to the public. You should continue existing cleaning and hygiene practices for outdoor areas.
- The targeted use of disinfectants can be done effectively, efficiently, and safely on outdoor hard surfaces and objects frequently touched by multiple people (e.g., handrails, benches); make sure disinfectant has thoroughly dried before allowing children to play.
- Ensure [safe and correct use](#) and storage of disinfectants, including storing products securely away from children.

Make sure people are social distancing in the park.

In order to decrease the chance of COVID-19 spread, park administrators should consider:

- Monitoring areas where people are likely to gather and consider temporary closure to support social distancing practices. These areas might include sports fields, playgrounds, skateparks, basketball courts, tennis courts, and picnic areas. In the event of facility closures, park administrators may place physical barriers in these areas and post [signs](#) communicating that the area is closed.
- Posting [signs](#) discouraging groups from gathering in larger numbers than are currently recommended or allowed.
- If necessary, consider providing physical guides to ensure that people remain at least 6 feet apart while in the park. For example, markings on the ground, colored tape, or signs (in appropriate languages) to indicate safe distances.

Consider the appropriate timing and process for resuming youth camps, activities, and sports.

- Consult with public health officials and, as relevant, camps and youth sports leagues, about any plans for resuming activities and sports. Public health officials can provide guidance on appropriate timing of resumed activities in your community.
- When ready to resume camps, activities, and sports, review CDC's [Considerations for Youth and Summer Camps](#) and the [Considerations for Operating Youth Sports](#) for specific information on ways in which these organizations can protect campers, players, families, and communities, and slow the spread of COVID-19. These include promoting behaviors that reduce spread, maintaining healthy environments and healthy operations, and making plans for if someone in the program (campers, athletes, or staff) becomes sick. Consult with [state and local health officials](#) to determine if and how to put these considerations into place.

Use flexible sick leave and telework policies, especially for staff at **higher risk for severe illness** from COVID-19.

- Remind staff to [stay at home](#) if they are sick.
- Be as flexible as possible with staff attendance and sick leave policies.
- Identify staff whose duties would allow them to work from home and encourage teleworking when possible.
- Consider offering revised duties to staff who are at [higher risk of severe illness with COVID-19](#).

Keep your park staff informed about COVID-19 and preventive actions.

- Provide staff with [up-to-date information about COVID-19](#) in the local area and park policies on a regular basis.
- Communicate to park staff the importance of practicing healthy hygiene habits, such as [washing hands often](#), [covering coughs and sneezes](#), and [social distancing](#) to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Recommend and reinforce use of [masks](#) among staff. Masks should not be placed on:
 - Babies and children younger than 2 years old
 - Anyone who has trouble breathing
 - Anyone who cannot remove the mask without assistance
- If staff develop [symptoms](#) consistent with COVID-19, such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath, while at work, immediately have them [return home](#) from the park as soon as possible. Ask them to follow [CDC-recommended steps for persons](#)

[who are ill with COVID-19 symptoms.](#)

- If a staff member has a confirmed COVID-19 infection, inform other staff about their possible exposure to the virus, while maintaining confidentiality as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act; see [Public Health Recommendations for Community-Related Exposure](#) .

Review CDC's guidance for businesses and employers.

- Review CDC's [guidance for businesses and employers](#) to identify additional strategies to protect park staff during an outbreak of COVID-19.
- For additional questions or guidance, contact your state or local health department public health officials and in the case of the National Park Service, contact public health officials in the [Office of Public Health](#) [↗](#) .

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Content source: [National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases \(NCIRD\), Division of Viral Diseases](#)